

REVISION OF THE STUDY DOCUMENT ON REVELATION, INSPIRATION, AND INERRANCY

Introduction

When the Commission on Theology and Church Relations issued its "Study Document on Revelation, Inspiration, and Inerrancy," it proposed to deal with issues in the understanding and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures with which the Christian church as a whole is occupied in our time. For the purpose of setting forth some aspects of contemporary thinking in these areas, the study document summarized them in a so-called Position Two in contrast to more traditional views as expressed in Position One. At no time did the commission say, or intend to say, that either of these positions represented the stand of any one individual. By requesting the members of the church to give careful consideration to this material and to send their reactions to the commission, the commission clearly emphasized the preliminary character of the study document. That document has now served its purpose and is no longer before the church for action.

The commission herewith presents a partial revision, dealing with inspiration and inerrancy. It will be noted that the structure of the original study document has been superseded by a single, positive treatment of the subject. These statements on inspiration and inerrancy do not claim to be exhaustive or definitive. Special comprehensive studies in all aspects of the doctrine concerning the Scriptures and their interpretation are being undertaken and should produce results of lasting value and benefit to the church. In any event the commission is not attempting to write a dogmatic treatise but rather "to indicate the *limits* within which and the *lines* along which our *common* study of these issues should move and so give *stimulus* and *direction* to a concerted investigation of the problems on the part of all members of our Synod" (Study Document, p. 2) [Italics not in the original].

A STATEMENT ON THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

A. Inspiration Is the Work of God the Holy Spirit

1. What is inspiration? The Scriptures use the word "inspired" in only one passage (2 Tim. 3:16); they do not analyze the process; they say simply that men who are inspired speak or write "*in the Spirit*" (Matt. 22:43; Rev. 1:10), as men "*filled* with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:67; Micah 3:8), or as men "*moved* [or *impelled*] by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). The Scriptures are speaking clearly when they speak in this way, for they are speaking to people who know (or can find out) from the rest of the Scriptures what the power, work, and blessing of the Holy Spirit is; from that knowledge they can get an idea what it means to be *in*, *filled with*, or *moved by* the Spirit. Paul uses the phrase "*in Christ*" and can count on being understood because his readers know the power, the work, and the blessing of Christ.

If we want to understand inspiration more fully, we therefore turn to what the Scriptures say about the power, work, and blessing of the Holy Spirit in general and apply the knowledge gained in this way to our understanding of inspiration. This is letting Scriptures interpret Scripture. The Nicene Creed is operating in this way when it places the statement on inspiration ("Who spake by the prophets") in series and in connection with its other descriptions of the power and works of the Holy Spirit.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, *who spake by the prophets*. And I believe one holy Christian and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the resurrection of the dead; and the life of the world to come.

B. The Holy Spirit Is the Spirit of Power

2. The Nicene Creed calls the Spirit "the Lord and Giver of Life." The Creed is thereby ascribing to the Spirit the highest power; there is no greater power than the power to create life. The Scriptures speak of the Spirit as having and exercising this creative power (Ps. 104:30; Gen. 1:2). As at the beginning of the world, so at the end of this age it is the power of the Spirit which will create the new world of God, the world to come (Is. 11:2, 6-9; 32:15; 44:3, 4). The creative power of the Spirit will restore the dead to life (Rom. 8:11; cf. Ezek. 37:1-14). The new, immortal body of the resurrected dead will be a body renewed by the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:44).

3. This creative power lived and worked in prophets and apostles. The prophet Micah says: "As for me [in contrast with false prophets], I am filled with *power*, with the *Spirit* of the Lord, and with justice, and might" (Micah 3:8); and he connects this Spirit of power directly with his word when he goes on to say: "to declare to Jacob his transgressions and to Israel his sin." The apostle Paul says: "My *speech* and my *message* were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the *Spirit* and *power*, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the *power of God*" (1 Cor. 2:4, cp. 2:13). And again: "Christ has wrought through me . . . by Word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the *power of the Holy Spirit*, so that . . . I have fully *preached* the Gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:18, 19).

4. What does this mean for our understanding and teaching of the inspiration of the Scriptures: It means that we recognize that the Spirit of power was at work in the apostles and prophets when they wrote the words of the Holy Scriptures. We also recognize that the Spirit of power is at work in and through these words now when they are read, spoken, preached, or sung. We know that the inspired word is a divinely created word, not a word produced by men but a word given by God.

We know the inspired word as a divinely creative word, a word with a power that no merely human word has. We therefore stand in awe of this word. We know that we dare not deal with this word according to our own ideas (2 Peter 1:20), toy with it, or even resist it. If we do, we shall be destroyed by it. For those who believe it and obey it will be "a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19), the light of God's new world shining even now in this dark world of sin and death, the light of heaven on earth.

C. The Holy Spirit Is the Power in History

5. The Spirit is the "Lord and Giver of Life"; He is active and powerful in creation and re-creation. The Spirit "who proceedeth from the Father and the Son" is active also in the history that runs from creation to re-creation. In the power of the Spirit of God the great leaders of Israel do their work for God and God's people: Moses (Num. 11:25; Is. 63:10-14), Joshua (Deut. 34:9), the judges (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19), kings (1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6; 1 Sam. 16:13). The Spirit is the decisive power in the history of the people of God (Zech. 4:6; Hag. 2:5). The Spirit is the decisive power in the history of all nations; He, not the massive military power of man, has the last word and the final victory (Is. 31:3).

6. Through His prophet God promises that the Messiah shall establish His righteous reign on earth and bring back the peace of Paradise in the power of the Spirit of the Lord (Is. 11:3-10). According to the promise, the Servant of the Lord shall be "a covenant to the people, a light to the nations" in the power of the Spirit (Is. 42:1-7). As it was promised, so it came to pass. The history of Jesus the Servant Messiah is marked throughout by the presence and power of the Spirit. The Spirit's presence and power is seen in the record of Jesus' conception (Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:35), His baptism (Matt. 3:16, 17), His temptation (Matt. 4:1), His victory over demons (Matt. 12:28), His words (John 3:33, 34; 6:63; Acts 1:2), His whole Servant ministry (Matt. 12:18; Luke 4:14-21), including the cross (Heb. 9:14).

7. When Jesus returns to the Father, He continues His work in history through His apostles by the Spirit. The Spirit equips the apostles for their task of witness; the Spirit teaches and reminds them of all they have seen and heard. He witnesses to and glorifies the Christ and so leads them into all truth (John 14:26; 15:26, 27; 16:13-15). Because the Spirit speaks in the apostles, their witness to Jesus Christ is not a mere report about Him; rather, their witness confronts the world with Christ and through Him convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11). Their word forgives and retains sin with divine authority (John 20:21-23).

8. Working by the Word and sacraments through men in the history of this world, the Spirit produces that which is not of this world. The Spirit gathers the church. The old order, where "sin reigned in death" (Rom. 5:21), is overcome; "the law of the Spirit of life

in Christ Jesus" sets men free from the old "law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). "By one Spirit" all men are "baptized into one body" (the church) and all are "made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). Thus there is created the new, eternal people of God, who confess with Paul: "Through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness" (Gal. 5:5). The presence and power of the Spirit in the church now is "the guarantee of our inheritance"; His powerful presence is a foretaste and pledge of the new heavens and the new earth which we shall inherit at the end of this world (Eph. 1:13, 14; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Heb. 6:4, 5).

9. What does this mean for our understanding and teaching of the inspiration of the Scriptures? As we keep this connection between the Spirit and history firmly in mind, we see by faith that the historical character of the Scriptures is evidence of their inspiration; for the Spirit of God works in history through inspired words uttered at particular times and places for particular needs of the people of God. We see both the oneness of all the divine words, as creations of the one Spirit, and the particular quality of each word spoken in the power of the Spirit at a certain point in history. We shall therefore avoid the danger of trying to make each word say everything.

10. We see also that the divine control of the apostle or prophet is not limited to the moment of the inspired writing but involves also God's governance of the man's whole previous history. The Spirit working in and through prophet and apostle takes the whole man, with all that his history has given him and made of him, into His service and moves him to speak "from God" (2 Peter 1:21). The word of God spoken or written by inspired men at God's command has on it the impress of the personality, character, and style of the historical individual. This should put an end to all talk of mechanical inspiration.

11. We see also that the Scriptures, precisely in their historical character, are *Holy* Scriptures, since they are the product of the Spirit who produces in history that which is not of this world. We shall remember that we cannot treat an inspired document as just one more historical document, that we cannot take "laws of history" derived from documents that are wholly of this world and simply apply them to an inspired document.

D. The Holy Spirit Is the Spirit of Revelation

12. St. Paul calls the Holy Spirit the "Spirit of . . . revelation" (Eph. 1:17). "God," he says, "has revealed . . . through the Spirit" what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no heart of man has conceived (1 Cor. 2:9, 10). "By the Spirit" the mystery of Christ has been revealed to apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:5). St. John "was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" when "the revelation of Jesus Christ" was made known to him (Rev. 1:10; 1:1). The Old Testament, too, connects the Spirit with the divine revelation given through the prophets. The prophet is called "a man of the Spirit" (Hos. 9:7); he is "filled . . . with the Spirit of the Lord . . . to de-

clare to Jacob his transgression" (Micah 3:8). The Spirit of the Lord falls upon the prophet and enables him to say, "Thus says the Lord" (Ezek. 11:5). When Ezra looks back over the history of God's people, he confesses: "Thou . . . didst warn them by Thy Spirit through the prophets" (Neh. 9:30; cf. 9:20, "Thou gavest Thy good Spirit to instruct them").

13. It is difficult to draw a sharp line between inspiration and revelation. The inspired prophetic and apostolic word, the Scripture inspired by God, is the word by which God's revelation reaches man, for through this word God makes known His will to man and makes His will count in the life of man. That is why this word is "profitable" (2 Tim. 3:16) as is no human word, no matter how good and wise it may be. It does for man what man cannot do for himself. It is profitable "for teaching"; it brings man into the presence of God, makes known to him the work and will of God. It is useful "for reproof"; it brings sinful man low, it makes him bow before the holy God; it works repentance. It is useful for "correction" ("restoration"); it raises man up and lets him stand before his God. It is useful for "training"; it takes the life of man in hand, lays on him the kindly yoke of the Son of God, and makes man a servant of God "equipped for every good work." It works sanctification (2 Tim. 3:16). The inspired word does what only the Spirit of God can do; it makes man "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15).

E. The Spirit of God and the Word of God

14. The Spirit gives the revealing word, and He works through the revealing word. Inspiration is verbal inspiration. In this connection it is worth noting that many references to a word of God in the Scriptures are, at bottom, a witness to inspiration; for the Scriptures again and again say of the word of God just what they say of the Spirit of God; "word" and "Spirit" are pictured as doing the same work of God. According to the Scriptures the Spirit is active in the creation of the world; so is the word (Gen. 1:2; cf. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, etc.; Ps. 33:9; 148:5). The Spirit of God works the new creation; so does the word: When Jesus proclaims "the acceptable year of the Lord," the year of jubilee begins. It is there. "Today," Jesus tells His hearers, "this scripture has been fulfilled *in your hearing*" (Luke 4:18-21). The Spirit of God is the source of the prophet's power; so is God's word. Ezekiel, for example, says that the Spirit of the Lord "fell upon" him, and so he could say: "Thus says the Lord" (Ezek. 11:5). Jeremiah says, "The word of the Lord came to me"; thus he was enabled to say, "Thus says the Lord" (Jer. 1:1, 2). Both prophets are describing the same act of God.

So in the New Testament also. The angel Gabriel says concerning John the Baptist: "He will be filled with Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:15); St. Luke says, "The word of the Lord came to John." They are both saying: John is "the prophet of the Most High" (Luke 1:76); through John God gives "knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:77). When

Paul calls his apostolic preaching the word of God (1 Thess. 2:13), he is saying the same thing as when he says that he has received the Spirit and speaks in words taught by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12, 13). "Word" and "Spirit" are closely linked in the thought and language of the Scriptures. The combination of "verbal" and "inspiration" is a fitting and natural one.

15. The inspired words of the Holy Scriptures are all in the service of the one Word of God, the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us; they are all refractions and reflections of the one Light of the world. The one great task of the Spirit is to glorify the Christ. By the power of the Spirit working in words we can hear the incarnate Word; we can confess and proclaim: "Jesus is Lord."

A STATEMENT ON THE INERRANCY OF THE SCRIPTURES

1. God in the Holy Scriptures speaks to us in many and various ways. His written word uses many forms of human speech, from sober straightforward narrative to the picture language of poetry and the symbolism of numbers. He speaks of the glories of the world to come in the language and images of this world, language and images that we can grasp. He graciously comes down to our level and speaks of Himself in terms of our human life and experience. In defining the inerrancy of the Scriptures we must therefore keep the definition broad enough to cover all this variety of divine speech in human form.

2. The Lutheran Symbols confess the inerrancy of the Scriptures with simple and forceful words: "They will not lie to you" (Large Catechism, V. 76, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Tappert, p. 455; compare also the Formula of Concord, Epitome, VIII, 13, ed. Tappert, p. 483; Large Catechism, IV, Baptism, 57, ed. Tappert, p. 444). When we make that confession our own, our faith, a faith created by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures themselves, expresses the conviction that the witness of Scripture in all its parts in their intended sense is true and wholly reliable. These words of the Scriptures are inerrant because they are inspired by God — words taught by the Holy Spirit, written by men moved by the Holy Spirit. These inspired words in all their various forms are the word of God. They are true and will not lead astray, but will accomplish the purpose for which God gave them. In them the church hears the very voice of the God of her salvation.

3. Certain aspects of inerrancy need further study. We should study the inspired, inerrant Scriptures with the question in mind: Just *how* does the Holy Spirit make use of the various forms of language and literature in order to do His work, to make men "wise unto salvation"? Further study of the inerrancy of the Scriptures should include an examination of the various forms of language and literature employed by the inspired authors. This involves a more comprehensive study of hermeneutics, or principles of interpretations. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations is proposing

REVELATION, INSPIRATION, INERRANCY

such a larger study to the Detroit Convention. Cf. *Convention Workbook (Reports and Overtures)* for the 1965 Convention, pp. 35, 36, Recommendations 37 and 38.

4. Such a study should be made in the spirit of our brethren of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, who have in their "Theses on Scripture and Inspiration" (p. 22) dealt with the question of inerrancy in exemplary fashion; they confess the inerrancy of the Scriptures. They believe it as a truth which "cannot be seen with human eyes nor . . . proved to human reason."

With the whole true Church of God we confess the Bible to be the inerrant Word of God. This inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures cannot be seen with human eyes, nor can it be proved to human reason; it is an article of faith, a belief in something that is hidden and not obvious. We believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God and therefore inerrant. The term "inerrancy" has no reference to the variant readings found in the extant textual sources because of copyists' errors or deliberate alterations; neither does it imply an absolute verbal accuracy in quotations and in parallel accounts, such absolute uniformity evidently not having been part of

God's design. We believe that the holy writers, whom God used, retained the distinctive features of their personalities (language and terminology, literary methods, conditions of life, knowledge of nature and history as apart from direct revelation and prophecy). God made use of them in such a manner that even that which human reason might call a deficiency in Holy Scripture must serve the divine purpose. Furthermore, it pleased the Holy Ghost to employ authors possessing various gifts for writing on the same subject. How in such cases it is possible that differing accounts of the same event or the same saying are the true and inerrant report of one and the same fact cannot and need not always be shown by rational harmonization. We must believe it until "that which is in part shall be done away" and "that which is perfect is come" (1 Cor. 13:10). We reject the attempts of modern religious liberalism to make man the judge of the Word of God. None of the natural limitations which belong to the human mind even when under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost can impair the authority of the Bible or the inerrancy of the Word of God; for Holy Scripture is the book of divine truth which transcends everything called truth by the wise men of this world (1 Cor. 1:17 ff., 27; Col. 2:8) and is therefore able to make us "wise unto salvation." (2 Tim. 3:15)

TH. F. NICKEL, Chairman
HERBERT J. A. BOUMAN, Secretary

Recommendation Concerning the Statement on Revelation

Along with the statements on *Inspiration* and *Inerrancy* the commission had hoped to submit a statement on revelation to the convention. It has become clear, however, that this study, if it is to profit the church, must be given more time. The commission therefore

Recommends, That a thorough study of revelation be included in the comprehensive hermeneutical study which the commission is recommending to the Synod (see Convention Workbook, pp. 35, 36).

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